

STRINGS

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News & Notes : DBR Livens Up the Dance



For Violinist DBR, It's All in the Dance

In October 2007, then-presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama was a guest on The Ellen DeGeneres Show. As was the customary greeting on the award-winning daytime program, Obama danced beside DeGeneres. It lasted less than a minute, but shook the core of Haitian-American violinist and composer Daniel Bernard Roumain. "For most people, that's a pretty innocuous, meaningless moment trivial," Roumain says. "For me, try really significant. When you dance with someone, it's a conversation, it's almost an intimate act. . . . To have this mixed-race candidate, who is obviously intelligent, to be so articulate and comfortable with his body with a white lesbian woman on national and international television, there were so many things that happened in that moment that I think we overlooked and had taken for granted.

"It was something that would have never happened 20, 40, 50 years ago; certainly not on television, and certainly not with a presidential candidate."

That moment has become the subject of Roumain's new work, "Symphony for Dancers, Dreamers, and Presidents," which will receive its world premiere at a New World Symphony preseason concert on September 25 at the Lincoln Theatre in Miami. The symphony is being funded by the Sphinx Commissioning Consortium, which is made up of nine partner orchestras and led by the Sphinx Organization. In addition to the NWS premiere, the work will be programmed into the 2010-11 seasons of the Cincinnati, Detroit, New Jersey, and Virginia symphony orchestras, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Nashville and Richmond symphonies, and the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra.

"The piece is spunky, upbeat, and puts a smile on your face," Roumain says. "But I'm getting at conversation. I'm getting at dancing as an idea toward conversation. How do we converse? A conversation has to do with synergy, collaboration; I do something, you do something; call and response, we do something together."

Roumain plans to ask orchestra members to take a more active role in the piece. "Wouldn't it be wonderful to see one of those Philadelphia orchestra members, who never says a word, put down their instrument, stand up, and dance with someone else in the orchestra?" he says. Put on your dancing shoes, Philadelphia.